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WHITE HOUSE FOR OFFICE OF THE VICE-PRESIDENT
DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP, G/TIP

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KCRM](#) [KWMN](#) [SMIG](#) [ELAB](#) [MOPS](#) [MU](#)
SUBJECT: ADDRESSING OUR TIER 3 TIP DISPUTE WITH OMAN

REF: A. MUSCAT 426 B. MUSCAT 425

Classified By: Ambassador Gary A. Grappo for Reasons 1.4 b/d.

¶1. (C) Summary: The dispute over the Oman's Tier 3 ranking in the 2008 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report stems from the government's refusal to accept that there may be a trafficking problem in Oman, as well as its extreme sensitivity to its public image. Oman's threatened reappraisal of "all aspects" of our bilateral relationship unless we retract the tier placement could affect implementation of the U.S.-Oman Free Trade Agreement, our Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) programming, public diplomacy initiatives, and perhaps even renewal of our Base Access Agreement (currently scheduled for 2010). In order to solve this dispute, Post recommends continued high-level contact with the Omanis to reassure them of the importance of our relationship and to work with them to determine an objective mechanism to quantify the level of trafficking into and through Oman. End summary.

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The Core of the Dispute
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¶2. (C) As Oman's oral and written rebuttals to the 2008 TIP report make clear (refs A, B), Oman and the U.S. have very different perspectives on the need and method to address trafficking in Oman. The government's central argument against its Tier 3 ranking is that Oman does not have a significant trafficking problem and that its existing laws and institutions are sufficient to handle it. This belief likely stems, in part, from a lack of understanding of what constitutes trafficking.

¶3. (S) Oman highly values its image, both domestic and global. It regularly touts its record on rule of law, respect for human rights, religious tolerance and low rates of crime. A compliant Omani media feeds the public a steady diet of praise for the Sultan and the achievements of the "Blessed Renaissance." Not surprisingly, therefore, Oman is particularly angry that we would impugn its record on human rights publicly, and continues to ask us for specific evidence of trafficking - e.g. number of victims, locations of abuse, and identity of abusers and victims - which we are unable to provide. Oman refuses to accept its Tier 3 ranking without such evidence. Neither does it accept, despite post's best efforts, our explanation that its tier ranking reflects insufficient government action, not the size of the trafficking problem. It is unlikely that Omani authorities will take determined action to combat trafficking or protect victims until convinced that there is a real problem to address.

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What is at Stake
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¶4. (C) The top officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) - Sayyid Badr al-Busaidi, the Secretary General, and Yusef bin Alawi, the Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs

- have made clear that Oman will not move on our recommended action steps until we first retract the Tier 3 designation. They have been told that this is a step we cannot take, however, without some action from the Omanis. We therefore are caught in a dispute in which there is little common ground, and with a partner that has indicated its willingness to wager the relationship on the outcome of the matter.

15. (S) Post is uncertain what aspects of our bilateral relationship the government is willing to sacrifice if the dispute over its tier ranking cannot be resolved. Sayyid Badr's statement that our Free Trade Agreement (FTA) - a personal initiative of the Sultan, which still is awaiting implementation - may be fair game, however, indicates that the reassessment could be far-reaching. While stopping the FTA would hurt Oman's economic interests far more than our own, failure to negotiate the renewal of our Base Access Agreement and Fuels Agreement, which are of high military importance, would deal the U.S. a real blow. (Note: Post believes that this action is unlikely, however, given the important security backstop we represent for Oman. End note.) Oman might even reconsider its moderate stance in support of the Peace Process and its low-key but consistent engagement with Israel. We must also contemplate that Oman may stop or severely limit our more than 30 MEPI programs, cooperation on labor issues, cultural and educational exchanges through our Public Diplomacy section, and other joint programming and agreements. Finally, we would expect that at a minimum Post will lose at least some of its access to government authorities at all levels, including the Ambassador's special access to the Sultan.

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Recommendations
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16. (C) In order to create common ground to engage Oman on TIP in the face of its unprecedented strong response, we ultimately may have to find an agreed way to quantify the extent of trafficking into and through Oman. In the interim, we will need to reassure Oman of the value we place on our bilateral relationship and walk the government back from the extreme position that it has adopted.

17. (S) The June 10 call between Assistant Secretary (A/S) Welch and bin Alawi was a good first step to show our intent at senior levels to resolve our dispute with Oman over its tier ranking. Post recommends convoking Oman's ambassador in Washington to the Department to reassure her of our commitment to preserving the relationship and to working with Oman on trafficking. At some point, we may need to follow up with a letter or other, more direct communication from the President or Vice President to the Sultan to reassure him of the importance to the U.S. of our bilateral relationship and outline concrete actions that we are prepared to take, in concert with Oman, to help move it off Tier 3. For instance, we could pledge to upgrade Oman to Tier 2 Watch List if it passes strong anti-TIP legislation within the 60-day reassessment period.

18. (C) We also could agree to support and respect the findings of a credible, independent third-party study on the extent of trafficking in Oman. A United Nations agency or non-governmental organization may be best suited to undertake this kind of assessment, but the choice of the organization would have to be Oman's. Such a report could provide the Omanis and us with a mutually agreeable frame of reference in which to cooperate to combat trafficking.

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Comment
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19. (C) Feeling that its Sultan has been dishonored and its national honor has been impugned, Oman is responding emotionally to what it perceives as an unwarranted public attack by a friend. The U.S. should avoid a similarly emotional response and, while standing behind our report,

continue to explore cooperative ways to address the issues raised by the Omanis while reminding them that our relationship transcends this one dispute.

¶10. (C) In the end, Oman always has seen its relationship with us as a special one under which they believe they have extended special preferences, privileges and treatment to us. The perceived lack of reciprocity, for example, our unwillingness to accept their commitment to pass anti-TIP legislation and consequent treatment as any other country under Tier 3 consideration, may suggest to the Omanis that we do not see the relationship as special.

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